U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT WINNEMUCCA FIELD OFFICE NV-020-03-

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT FOR

SeaWest WindPower Inc. Metrological Towers N-75888

I. Purpose and Need

SeaWest WindPower is proposing to place 2 metrological (Met) towers in the Osgood Mountains for the purpose of testing and monitoring the wind for a possible wind energy generation site.

II. Proposed Action

SeaWest WindPower is proposing to install 2 temporary, tilt-up anemometer masts to collect wind speed, wind direction, and temperate data under the auspices of Title V of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 and Title 43, Section 2802 of the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR).

Each tower will be 164 feet in length, supported by 8 guy wires and 8 screw in anchors. The towers are 6" diameter hollow steel tubes that rest on a 2 foot square steel base plates. Near the top of the each tower is a horizontal arm for mounting the sensors.

No fencing, grading, utilities or road construction is required. No regular maintenance of the tower or related equipment will be required. All materials and personnel required to install the towers will be helicoptered to the site. Electrical power to operate the data gathering equipment and communication equipment will be supplied by solar cells attached to the tower.

Tower 1 will be located in T. 38 N, R. 42 E., Sec 6 Tower 2 will be located in T 37 N., R. 41 E., Sec 20

The proposed action does not conflict with any known state or local planning, ordinance or zoning, and is consistent with the updated Management Framework Plan for the Paradise-Denio Area.

III. Alternatives to the Proposed Action

A. Single Tower Alternative

Under the single tower alternative only one tower would be installed. The proposed towers are approximately 10 to 11 miles apart. If only one tower is installed the environmental impacts, if any, would be limited to only one site.

However, due to the distance between the towers the proponent will not be able to gather enough data to make a determination if a wind energy generation facility in this area is feasible.

B. No Action Alternative

Under a No-Action alternative the application would be rejected and the applicant would not be allowed to install either tower and no wind energy data will be gathered.

IV. The Environmental Documentation

A. Vegetation: The proposed sites are on the mountain ridge range site. The plant community is dominant by low and black sagebrush with an under story of bluegrass, Idaho fescue, goldenweed, phlox, daisy and buckwheat. The implementation of the proposed action would cause minimal damage to existing vegetation. There would not be any unacceptable environmental impacts resulting from implementation of the proposed action.

B. Range Resources:

The active animal unit months (AUM's) would remain the same resulting in no effect to the grazing. The land area encompassed by the facility would not markedly reduce the permittee's available forage. There would not be any unacceptable environmental impacts resulting from implementation of the proposed action.

C. Visual Resources (VRM):

The site is located in the Visual Resource Management Class IV. Management objectives for class IV are:

Changes may subordinate the landscape character but must reflect what could be a natural occurrence.

There would not be any environmental consequences resulting from implementation of the proposed action.

D. Threatened and Endangered Species:

The Osgood Mountains milkvetch, (<u>Astragalus yoder-williamsii</u>) has been identified in proximity to the Tower 1 site location. This species is listed by the State of

Nevada as critically endangered and threatened with extinction pursuant to NRS 527.270. The Osgood Mountains milkvetch Area of Critical Environmental Concern (N-43886) has been designated in the S½ and the NE¼ of Lot 9, N½ of Lot 12, Sec. 6, T. 38 N., R. 42 E., which is in the same section and just north of the Tower site #1 proposed location.

According to the Nevada Natural heritage Database dated January 2003, no other Threatened and Endangered or sensitive plant or animals have been observed in the area of the proposed Tower 1 and there are no Threatened and Endangered or sensitive plant or animals have been observed in the area of the proposed Tower 2.

Possible impacts to individual Osgood Mountain milkvetches could result from the proposed action. Impacts might include crushing and possibly destroying individual plants by equipment or placement of the tower base plate.

E. Wildlife:

There may be short-term disruption to species' foraging and utilizing available shelter during the construction period. There will not be any locations on the monopoles, suitable for raptors to perch while locating prey. Possible resulting impacts to bird populations and small ground dwelling mammals would be within acceptable limits. There should not be any unacceptable impacts resulting from implementation of the Preferred Alternative.

The proposed Tower site #1 is located in within the Eden Valley Sage-grouse Population Management Unit. The site has been classified as nesting, summer and winter habitat. There shouldn't be any unacceptable impacts to Sage-grouse since the tower would not be placed within 2-mile proximity of a known lek and as stated previously, there are no raptor perching sites on the proposed structure.

Proposed Tower site #2 is not located within a Sage-grouse Population Management Unit or within known Sage-grouse habitat, so no impacts to Sage-grouse are anticipated.

F. Migratory Birds:

A complete migratory bird inventory has not been completed for this site. However, migratory birds have been identified in its vicinity. Common migratory birds which may use the area as habitat include ducks, geese, song birds, owls, blackbirds, crows, ravens, hawks, finches, juncos, killdeer, robins, doves, and meadow larks. The proposed project should not have negative impacts on migratory birds.

G. Noxious Weeds:

No on-the-ground surveys for noxious weeds have been conducted within the project area. Due to the limited extent of disturbance associated with the construction of the

mono-pole, the spreading of noxious weeds for that portion of the authorization is not anticipated.

H. Native American Concerns:

The proposed action lies within the traditional territory of Northern Paiute and Western Shoshone peoples. At present no properties in the vicinity are known to be places of religious or traditional importance to these groups. Unlike archaeological resources, however, places of Native American traditional or religious importance may not contain material remains recognizable to cultural resource specialists and may go undetected. Therefore, it is vital that input be solicited from local tribal officials. A solicitation letter has been forwarded the Ft. McDermitt and Winnemucca Tribal Councils and the Battle Mountain Band Council notifying them of the proposed action and asking them to voice any concerns that they may have. In the event that concerns are raised, the BLM will ensure that they are considered prior to project implementation.

I. Cultural Resources:

Although the area proposed for this action has not been inventoried for cultural resources, inventories have been conducted in similar settings. These data indicate that significant prehistoric properties tend to be located near canyon mouths on the flanks of mountain ranges or near reliable water sources such as springs or seeps. In mountain top settings similar to that of the proposed action, prehistoric resources tend sparse, consisting primarily of isolated artifacts or small, surficial lithic scatters. In general, the potential for significant prehistoric cultural resources in such settings is low.

The Osgood Mountains contain important tungsten and gold deposits and, as such, have has been the focus of major mining activity. According to Willden (1964:112-113, Table 19) the majority of activity took place in the 1940-1950's, although mining continues there to this day (e.g., the Getchell mine). Given the intensity of mining operations, the potential for related cultural resources is high, though some of these may not be more than 50 years old and would not be subject to protection under the National Historic Preservation Act.

Although ranching also has a long history in the Osgood Mountains area, associated activities tend to be centered in basins or basin margins. While ranching might be focused at springs or seeps in other settings, the potential for significant cultural resources on mountain tops is generally low.

Given that fact that no fencing, grading, utilities or road construction is proposed, the amount of ground disturbance associated with this proposal is negligible. This fact, coupled with the generally low cultural resource potential of the area, makes it highly unlikely that significant resources will be affected.

J. Riparian:

There are no riparian areas in the immediate vicinity of the proposed site. There would not be any unacceptable environmental impacts resulting from implementation of the proposed action.

K. Soils: The soils of the proposed site are very shallow. Intense winds over the proposed site inhibit snow accumulation and thus lower effective precipitation. These soils have high amounts of gravel and cobbles on the surface and throughout the soil profile. These rock fragments occupy the plant growing surface, but protect the soils from erosion. Erosion hazard for both wind and water are slight. There would not be any unacceptable environmental impacts resulting from implementation of the proposed action.

L. Recreation:

There are limited recreational uses of this area. Recreational uses are likely to be hunting, photography, hiking, and horse-back riding. Recreational uses and experiences would likely remain the same. There would not be any unacceptable environmental impacts resulting from implementation of the proposed action.

M. Wild Horses and Burros:

The site is not within a Herd Management Area.

V. <u>Mandatory Critical Elements:</u>

The following critical elements of the human environment are either not present or not affected by the preferred alternative:

Air quality, environmental justice, prime or unique farmlands, flood plains, hazardous or solid wastes, ground or drinking water quality, wetlands or riparian zones, wild and scenic rivers, wilderness, and affects on energy development.

VI. <u>Impacts of the No Action Alternative</u>

Under the no-action alternative, one or both of the towers would not be installed and no impacts to identified resources would occur. The proponent would not be able to gather the necessary date required to develop a wind energy facility.

VII. Cumulative Impacts Analyses

Cumulative impacts are those effects on resources within an area or region caused by a combination of past, present and reasonable foreseeable future actions (RFFA's). These impacts may be individually minor but added together over time may become significant (See 40 CFR 1508.7).

A. Past & Present

The past and present actions include grazing, mining and recreation. Grazing and mining are the dominant activities that occur within the area. Under the proposed action these act ivies will continue. The area is not considered a high recreation use area.

B. Reasonable Foreseeable Future Actions (RFFAs)

RFFAs include potential increase in wind energy development through time if the data collected by this action indicated that the wind resources available are sufficient to economically support a wind energy generation facility. Prior to the development of a wind energy generation facility a further more in-depth environmental analysis will be required.

Cumulative impacts from the no action alternative would be minimal. The proposed action and associated environmental impacts would not occur.

VIII. Mitigation Measures

The holder should place the tower base-plate on bare ground to avoid impacts to the Osgood Mountains milkvetch.

The holder should avoid placing Tower 1 within the Osgood Mountains milkvetch ACEC.

There should be no off-road travel for construction of Tower 1, in order to prevent impacts to the Osgood Mountains milkvetch.

IX. Relationship of Proposed Action to Land Use Plans

A. Ownership

The surface and all mineral rights of the land included in the proposed action are in federal ownership, under the administration of the Bureau of Land Management.

No rights-of-way or permits would be impacted by this proposal.

B. Consultation and Coordination

SeaWest WindPower Steven Steinhour

Winnemucca Tribal Council

Ft. McDermitt Tribe

Battle Mountain Band of the Te-Moak Tribe of Western Shoshone

Bureau of Land Management

Bob Edwards Supervisory Realty Specialist

Mark Ennes Archaeologist
Chuck Neill Weed Specialist

Barbara Keleher Recreation/Wilderness/VRM Specialist

Mike Zielinski Soil Scientist

Ken Detweiler Wildlife/ T&E Species Specialist /Wild Horses and Burros

Ronda Purdy Range Management Specialist

Jeff Johnson NEPA Coordinator

References Cited

Willden, Ronald

1964 Geology and Mineral Deposits of Humboldt County, Nevada. Nevada Bureau of Mines and Geology Bulletin 59. Mackay School of Mines, University of Nevada, Reno.